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ABSTRACT

In this guide to alternative education, the theory and practice of the "free school" movement is discussed from a pedagogical and political viewpoint. The current state of free schools is described and four major types of free schools are identified: Summerhillian, parent-teacher cooperative, free high schools, community elementary. The political and social issues raised by the movement are discussed at some length. The effect of this movement on educational policy is projected. A list of resources is given which includes journals, articles, books, and people, and organizations. (JY)

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By Allen Graubard

September 1972

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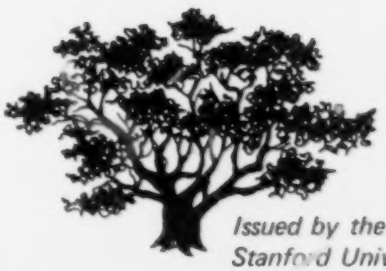

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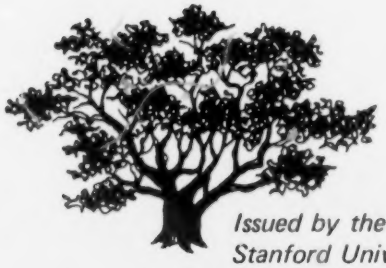

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Experience both within and outside the system makes Allen Graubard a knowledgeable author for such a paper as this.

A Harvard man, Dr. Graubard was director of The Community School, a free elementary and high school in Santa Barbara, California.

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately nine out of every ten children in the United States attend the public schools.

The others satisfy the compulsory education laws in private schools. The great majority of this group attend the Roman Catholic parochial schools, even though their number has declined sharply in the past several years due to financial and other difficulties.

Non-public schools which are not parochial cover a wide variety of types. The best-known of these is the preparatory school—the small expensive institution such as Phillips Exeter, Groton, Choate, and Miss Porter's. Attended mainly by children of the wealthy, these "academically superior" institutions are known for preparing their students for "appropriate" colleges such as Harvard, Yale or Smith.

Even these elite schools have felt the pinch over the past few years, with declining applications and slowing rate of growth, while military academies and boarding schools in general have actually declined in number and enrollment.

But during this time of rather hard times for the non-public school sector, a new non-public educational institution has emerged and grown rather spectacularly. The most popular descriptive term for this development is 'free school,' though it is also known as the 'new schools' or 'alternative schools movement.' The number of these free schools has grown from about 25 five years ago to perhaps 600 at present, with almost 200 founded in the past year (1971-72). These schools are usually tiny by urban public school standards; the average enrollment is about 33 students. So, in absolute numbers of participants—students, staff, parents—the development is very limited. But in terms of visibility, public impact, and symbolic significance, the importance of this new schools movement is relatively great.

The above figures (and others which will appear in this paper) are not without question. The basic difficulty is the problem of definition. What exactly—or even approximately—is a free school? The schools usually included in the category are quite varied, and there are many schools which share some of the free school characteristics but not others. Should these schools be included in the data? How 'free' does a school have to be to be legitimately called a free school?

THE FREE SCHOOL MOVEMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

The best way to approach these questions is to describe the free school movement, its theory and its practice.

Pedagogical Source

The basic theoretical notion of the free school movement is, naturally, 'freedom.' Over the past decade, a substantial literature has appeared which sets forth the ideas of educational reform associated with the rise of free schools. One popular anthology of these writings, edited by Ronald and Beatrice Gross, is *Radical School Reform*. These works have a two-fold perspective. They question the traditional ideas and practices of the schooling dominant now, and they also expound the conception of freedom and its meaning for childhood and education. This literature combines a sharp attack on the dominant pedagogy and its emotional and intellectual effects with a projection of a reform theory which holds freedom as its central virtue.

In its most uncompromising form, both the attack and the projection are found in A.S. Neill's widely-read *Summerhill*. The very small number of free schools which existed in the U.S. before the current wave were almost all explicitly modeled on Summerhill. Even when there is serious disagreement with many of Neill's ideas, free school advocates openly admit the importance and influence of both the school and the book about it. In recent years, the writings of Paul Goodman, John Holt, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, George Leonard, Jonathon Kozol, Herbert Kohl, Neil Postman, Charles Weingartner, Ivan Illich, George Dennison, James Herndon and others have popularized the general notions which underlie the free school idea.

The most detailed critique of public school methods is found in Charles Silberman's massive study *Crisis in the Classroom*, although Paul Goodman's older and more concise *Compulsory Mis-education* remains the most succinct and incisive attack on the assumptions and practices of American education. George Dennison's *The Lives of Children* remains the best account of what a free school is like in action.

The general idea of the 'freedom' perspective is that children are naturally curious and motivated to learn by their own active interests and desires. The most important condition for nurturing this natural capacity is freedom backed by the support of adults who enrich the environment and who are available to help the young people. In contrast, coercion and regimentation only damage the emotional and intellectual development of children. From such a perspective it follows that free school advocates oppose almost all of the main characteristics of public school organization and method: Large classes, teachers with absolute disciplinary and curricular power, rigid time-scheduling, 'required' curriculum, concern with silence and control, discipline and obedience, and constant evaluation and motivation by competition, represented by grading, testing, prizes and honors, and "ability tracking."

Almost every free school brochure expresses this perspective. Excerpts from two representative brochures should give the spirit that appears in hundreds of others:

> *The Second Foundation School is designed to be an alternative to traditional public and private education. Many students and teachers find the present schools stifling and restrictive with their rigid schedules, bells, passes, detention, and other instruments of regimentation. As a result students may do poorly, may fail, and may drop out, some in fact and some in attitude. Others may appear to achieve well in traditional systems when actually they are merely 'beating the system' and failing to achieve any lasting self-education. . . .*
>
> *The word 'free' comes up frequently in discussing schools like the Community School. . . . It points to a basic notion about people and values. The idea is that freedom is a supreme good; that people, including young people, have a right to freedom, and that people who are free will in general be more open, more humane, more intelligent than people who are directed, manipulated, ordered about, and forced to do or be in ways decided on by other people with power, however benevolent the intentions of those wielding the power. In practice, this means respect for the autonomy of the individual students. At school meetings, problems are discussed and rules made or changed as the whole community sees fit. The students have the freedom to decide on*

the kind of work they want to do; whether they want to participate in the on-going projects or whether they want to work on their own projects. There are teachers who value, respect and support this freedom–they are there to help students, to encourage them, to open new paths, to suggest, and yes, to criticize, because respect for the student means taking him seriously enough to express one's care, even if it means being sympathetically critical. We believe in an atmosphere of freedom and openness, where the criticism by a student of a teacher is also taken seriously and not considered a sign of lack of respect or of not knowing the proper way for a child to act . . .

As these excerpts indicate, the free school conception includes seeing the public school method as hindering the development of cheerful, original, creative, authentic inquiring humans, and instead as discouraging creativity, producing fearful stupidity and conformity. John Holt's *How Children Fail* is the most concrete description of the way the schools produce stupidity.

Political Source

Another emphasis of the free school idea (just as in the earlier Progressive Education movement which the free school movement revives in several respects) is on the participation of young people in the real on-going activities of the larger community and the corresponding involvement of 'non-professional' teachers in the education of the children. This is reflected in the rather negative attitude of free school people toward the whole system of teachers' colleges, education degrees, certification requirements, and licensing. The free school idea is that all sorts of people can be good teachers; that real experience in the world and a deep knowledge and understanding of the materials and skills in question plus a care for children are much more important than a standard course in pedagogy or classroom management.

In addition to the pedagogical perspective, a second source of support for an alternative school movement is political. By a political source, I mean the spirit behind the first 'freedom schools'–those which the civil rights movement helped create in Mississippi during the 'freedom summer' of 1964. People who felt that the schools were not helping their children and that the community should participate in the control of the schools decided to do something about it themselves. This movement within the Black community (now spreading to other minority communities) resulted in the foundation of a number of Black community schools. These schools emphasize control by the community–especially parents and community organizers. And they deliberately express Black consciousness in the curriculum and emphasize the schools' participation in the political and social struggle for equality.

In these schools, the more strictly pedagogical notion of allowing each child to unfold his individuality in almost total freedom is not so dominant as in the free schools established by people from the middle class. Conscious of the children's disadvantaged backgrounds and the harsh realities minorities face in this society, community schools have a fair amount of structure, including practices that are seldom if ever found in more Summerhillian middle-class free schools: Required attendance, some compulsory activity, and intense concern with skill training.

Each of these types of schools is an alternative, and each is a free school. But one trend emphasizes the role of the school in the community's struggle for freedom, equality and social justice, while the other represents the strongest possible claim for the individual child's freedom in learning and social development.

THE CURRENT STATE OF FREE SCHOOLS

The complex differences and possible tensions between these two sources of free schools makes it difficult to specify clearly what a free school is, as noted before. Most free schools express aspects of both of these sources in various combinations. These tensions exist even within individuals, providing a constant source of serious discussion. For example, Jonathon Kożol's recent book *Free Schools* expresses a sharply political community-school view of what free schools should be and is very critical of the rather apolitical, pedagogically-free schools.

This definitional problem makes data hard to specify accurately. Still, it is important to have some sense of the relatively objective figures. From a total of about twenty or so Summerhillian and Black community schools in 1967, the number grew to around 600 by the summer of 1972, with about 200 of these opening during the 1971-72 school year. It can be expected that an even greater number will open next year.

These schools are quite small, ranging from only 6 or 8 students to around 250 (the community schools tend to be the larger ones). The average size is 33 students, and approximately two thirds of the schools have enrollments of less than 40. Obviously, the warm intimate atmosphere where everyone knows everyone else is vital to the style of learning and governance which free schools espouse. The staff-student ratio is a rather astonishing 1:5, with many teachers working as volunteers or with very low salaries. The schools, being non-public, have to raise their own money. A fortunate few manage to get some foundation or government money; most have to make do with tuition and scrounging around with bake and rummage sales, gifts, and donations. The schools almost always charge a sliding scale of tuition, with people paying what they feel they can afford. In general, the scale of payment is substantially below what most would associate with the idea of private school

Financial problems are quite serious. Teachers are poorly paid; it is difficult to get a good physical plant or equipment. Many schools rent from sympathetic churches or fix up old garages, warehouses, barns or houses. A fair number of free schools last only a couple of years before they close. And almost always, financial problems are a large part of the pressures that lead to the closing.

It is obvious that if there were some arrangement such as a voucher plan where parents were given a choice as to where their tax money for education went, there would be much more participation in free schools than there is now. Many people are still involved in public schools only because there isn't a free school in their locality or because they can't afford to pay tuition.

It is quite amazing how free schools can survive with such slight financial resources. About a quarter of the schools have a per-pupil expenditure of less than $300, and the median is less than $600. These figures include rent, which public figures do not, so this should be taken into account in making comparisons. These compare to public school figures of $1000 or $1200 or, even in some places, $2000. At the same time, staff-student ratios in free schools are better than in public schools.

This means that free schools provide a great deal of individual attention, more than any public school can manage, yet they cost much less. This happens because free schools eliminate so many of the normal costs of public schools—the disciplinary and testing apparatus (e.g., truant officers), the expensive classrooms and classroom equipment, almost all of the administrative and janitorial apparatus, the record-keeping and other bureaucratic doings that take up so much attention in public schools. Much work is done by volunteers—parents and students, students from nearby colleges, and concerned community members, who do the necessary administration, much of the building upkeep, fund-raising, and field trips.

Also, and most important, highly qualified people are willing to volunteer teaching time or to work as full-time teachers for very little money, often not more than room and board. Many of these teachers would be in public schools (many free school teachers are ex-public school teachers) or even colleges at salaries three and four times greater than what the free school can scrape together. But the joys and satisfactions of the job seem to them more important—at least for a time—than money.

It is not that these teachers are voluntary ascetics. The few free schools that have obtained large foundation grants or government aid have tried to pay reasonable salaries, and the poorer schools wish they could. Ideally, free schools would have well-paid teachers and still maintain their good teacher-student ratio without exceeding normal public school expenditure levels.

What leads some people to call the free school

development a movement is the consciousness of most people involved that they are part of something bigger than their own tiny institution. Free school people have formed regional and local networks. There is a national *New Schools Exchange Newsletter* and several regional newsletters. There are frequent regional conferences, and free school people visit each others' schools, discuss problems and hopes, give each other encouragement and help start new schools.

KINDS OF FREE SCHOOLS

As was mentioned, the free school movement contains a variety of perspectives, sharing in common an opposition to methods of the public schools and an optimistic belief in the good effects which will come from creating a free environment for children to learn and grow in.

We can usefully distinguish the following kinds of alternative schools: the classical Summerhillian free school, the parent-teacher cooperative elementary school, the free high school, and the community elementary school.

Summerhillian

The oldest idea of the free school is the Summerhill-style community, usually quite small and enrolling children of all ages. A very high percentage of these schools are boarding schools (like Summerhill itself) with the goal of being a truly self-sufficient, intimate, even therapeutic, community—something much more than just a school. As the Summerhill Ranch School in Mendocino, California, wrote in its brochure:

> *Educationally, this school can be described as 24-hour life tutorial, where students and staff learn in accordance with their own interests . . . our emotional developments remain primary. Self-awareness, individuality and personal responsibility to oneself and to others here are most important. We have not the reward and punishments nor the competitiveness of public schools. Many of us regain self-confidence and awareness here, both of which aid us in dealing with the impersonal real world.*

These schools are almost exclusively white and middle class in their constituency, and when boarding schools, they are naturally quite expensive. They emphasize the emotional and expressive aspects of the personality rather than formal academic curriculum or job preparation. Development replaces achievement as the primary purpose. Collective decision-making often plays a central role in school activities. As at Summerhill, decisions are made by the whole community at regular community meetings.

Parent-Teacher Cooperative Elementary

A second type, which overlaps with the first, is the parent-teacher cooperative elementary school. These are formed by parents, often young white, liberal middle-class parents, who do not want their children subjected to the regimentation of the normal public schools. They read John Holt's books and Joseph Featherstone's articles on the 'open classroom' in the British Infant Schools. Some parents call up others; they organize a meeting and decide to start a free elementary school. They find sympathetic teachers who are willing to sacrifice financial reward and security for the satisfaction of working in a school they really believe in. Often one or more of the parents is a full-time teacher in the school. A parent board officially controls the school and participates regularly in school activities, although the staff handles much of the day-to-day operation. Tuition is paid on a sliding scale, and usually some low-income and minority group students are admitted free or almost free. But in general, these schools do not really appeal to low-income parents, and in any case, they are not intended to confront the problems of ghetto families.

These parent cooperatives differ from the relatively new progressive elementary schools which are on the fringe of the free school development, such as Shady Lane School in Pittsburgh or Fayerweather Street School in Cambridge. Like the older progressive schools, these schools, though rather libertarian in pedagogy, are well organized, well equipped, fairly expensive and rather professional about staffing and administration. In contrast, parent cooperatives tend to have looser organization, less equipment, fewer professional teachers, and more informality in the general mood.

Free High Schools

Another type is the free high school. This category includes several variants, determined by the social class constituency and the way the political and the pedagogical aspects of the freedom idea interact. Some are high school counterparts to the Summerhillian schools, oriented toward the youth counter-culture. In contrast with the elementary schools discussed above, it is the prospective students who usually provide much of the organizing impetus, along with some committed

adults who are potential staff.

These young people want to be involved honestly in the planning and governance of their own school. Several of these middle-class high schools project in their rhetoric and curriculum a politically radical perspective. This does not mean that all of the young people in such schools are political radicals or activists of any sort, but that some of the originators and staff are, and that an active concern with social issues is in the atmosphere. These schools often participate in anti-war and civil rights activities, and the classes often focus on the Vietnam War, draft resistance, women's liberation, and legal rights and difficulties of youth.

In the past couple of years, several white working class high schools have formed a development which has no parallel in the earlier progressive education movement. These schools involve mainly drop-outs and potential drop-outs who feel very hostile to the public high schools. Whereas the middle class high schools can charge tuition, working class schools do not have this option, for neither the students nor their parents have the money. Moreover, the parents do not usually find the political and pedagogical style of such schools familiar or appealing. The permissiveness of the free school is often congenial to progressive middle class parents, but has much less appeal to working class parents who suspect that such experimental schools will not serve the needs of their children.

These working class schools differ from their middle class counterparts by focusing on vocational education and remedial skill work and by exhibiting a real concern with thinking through what it means to be working class. For example, "Self Worth and Competency of Working Class Youth" was the name of a 1971 summer course at the Group School in Cambridge. According to the course description, "Self Worth" was:

> *. . . originally conceived with two express purposes in mind. Because of the obvious lack of information relating to the working class struggle in American history, both in elementary and high school curriculum, it was felt that an objective labor history course was necessary as a foundation for viewing working class competency and self worth. Once a basic historical foundation was laid, it was hoped that the class could begin to tackle the more personally related questions of 'how does it feel to be a kid without a history?' or 'if I as a working class youth have never learned about my history, whose culture have I adopted?'*

The working class schools—with their constituency of mainly drop-outs and push-outs from the public school—directly confront the tracking function of the public schools which prepares these students for the lower rungs of the social and job hierarchy. In contrast, students in middle class free schools have been slated for college and high career achievement. For them, the free high school is a way to get off, at least for a while, the beaten path to college and beyond.

Another variant of the high schools for drop-outs, more established and larger than the white working class schools or the more typical middle class-based free school, are the street academies for minority youth. The most famous of these is Harlem Prep (New York), with over 400 students, but there are such places in most large cities. They are organized by adults, often with the support of community groups (e.g., the local Urban League). They seek to re-awaken motivation in young people who have been completely turned off by school. While there is an atmosphere of discipline, the students do not perceive it as the same sort they experienced in the public school. Instead, street academy discipline comes from a staff who can relate well to students, often coming from the same background. Many times students take part in the discipline, seeing it as really being in their interests.

The street academies have a sense of participation, though far from the Summerhillian image of community, participatory democracy, and almost unlimited individual choice. The pedagogy with its emphasis on skills is more conventional, and the strong commitment to getting young people into college differs a great deal from the more typical free high schools.

Community Elementary

The community elementary schools, as described before, tend to be much larger and more highly organized than the usual free school. More than the middle class groups, the poor people who start community schools see the struggle—for community control of public schools as a vital goal; for them the politics of control are more important than the pedagogical emphasis of middle class reform groups. These community schools put great stress on skills, cultural pride and consciousness. Low-income parents, wary of romantic "freedom and spontaneity" rhetoric,

often seem to support the more traditional classroom approaches, including fairly strict discipline. Nevertheless, there is still a good deal of pedagogical innovation and libertarian atmosphere in these community schools. The implication here is that when the parents and community feel they are in control, they are more open to experimentation than when it is imposed by an outside system. For example, most of these schools share an aversion to fostering individual competition by means of grades; instead, they stress giving each child a sense of his or her own worth and capacities. In these schools, as in the public community-control schools such as CCED School in Boston or Morgan Community School in Washington, D.C., one finds variations of the open classroom.

The classifications above describe ideal types, however, many schools combine aspects of different types. For example, the New Community School, a high school in Oakland, has a large white middle class group, but provides a strong Black studies program for its large minority of poor Black students. Behind the different schools stands a variety of conceptions, not only of education but also of social change and how educational reform relates to more general political and social issues.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Within the Summerhillian tradition there is a definite apolitical quality. The school-community deliberately looks inward, sometimes consciously disengaging itself from the larger community and its affairs; the public schools in the area are simply ignored. This perspective makes a minimal political demand on the larger society. The school desires to be left alone by the authorities–for instance, by health and fire officials who don't like hippie schools–so that they can "do their own thing."

More oriented to social change is another apolitical perspective which conceives of free schools as exemplars and models of what good schools could be like, moving others, even in the public schools, to change. A still more radical rationale conceives of the growth of these free schools as a kind of strategy to attack and weaken the public school system as more people withdraw from it to start their own free schools.

Throughout, one underlying view of social change is that libertarian pedagogy–and the schools based upon it–will develop children who are joyful, cooperative, and peaceful, neither sexist nor racist nor repressed–and the more people like this, the greater the progress toward solving social ills and building a humane, just society.

This view is more often implicit than explicit. For most middle class elementary free schools, whether staff-run or parent-cooperative, the emphasis is on a small group providing for themselves the kind of education they want for their children. They don't like the kind of education offered in the public schools–at least for their own children–but they don't see that they can or should do much to change the public schools. They refrain from a political analysis of the function of public schools. The following excerpt from a brochure expresses a fairly common situation:

> *My wife and I started the school with the help-support of a few parents dedicated to the no-pressure idea, in fear and trembling since it was beyond our ability, and is not our responsibility–we pay our taxes for suitable schools. Fed up with the degrading and humiliating experience of our children in 'the system' we determined to at least have a 'school' for them–others joined us from a small newspaper ad.*

Speaking of tuition, these same parent-organizers write:

> *Sometimes we have felt rather crass. We charge at about the 'going rate' for the area. This rules out many who are sold on the principles of free education. Our justification goes like this: this is not our responsibility–if the system listened and acted in accord with the desires of people, there would now be available voluntary participation schools to which we would send our children.*

Schools like this can afford only a limited number of scholarship students. Many of the parents–including those just quoted–would be completely satisfied if there were a voucher system or easily available open classroom–free school options within the existing public school system.

The more politically-oriented middle class free schools would not be so easily satisfied. There we find strong elements of counter-cultural and counter-institutional feeling, as well as a real and justifiable fear that the system will attempt to coopt educational innovations and water down their effects. The dream of the counter-institutional "greening of America" perspective is that the dominant institutions will collapse as more and more people go off and build their own good places self-sufficient and uncompromised by the taint of corruption in the dominant institutions. In a more immediate sense, this vision sees free school education as a way of breaking down the socialization function that most public schools serve. That is, simply being what they are, free schools accomplish a worthwhile political goal by helping some children escape the "brainwashing" of the public school system.

For minority group community schools, this perception is very important. Most Black community schools are clear in setting forth a strong political analysis and reflecting it in the spirit and curriculum of the school. Whereas most brochures of middle class schools emphasize the pedagogical flaws of public schools–e.g., unnecessary regimentation, too large classes, insufficient scope for creative and emotional development–the minority group community school concentrates on the political inadequacies. The Nairobi Community School in East Palo Alto, California, writes in its brochure:

> *The destruction of our minds is planned, programmed. The racist school boards,*

teachers, administrators conspired to waste our precious youth, who knew they would force the change, plan, learn how to make the radical complete breakaway from systems of white control, manipulation and destruction. We went through the stages of seeking solutions, such as attempting a futile integration and sneaking into white neighborhoods to attend their schools of white supremacy, only to experience-death at an early age.

The white middle class free schools are clear in theory on what they are *not* going to be (authoritarian, repressive), but they often have very serious problems deciding what they *are* going to do. This is less a problem for the Black community schools. For example, the curriculum at Nairobi High includes African history, Black current events, and Black U.S. history, as well as physics, math, algebra, science, communications, reading, art, music and French. It is designed to "produce Black community scholars, who recognize our slave condition and the necessity of breaking these chains on our minds, to heal these scars on our backs and souls." This type of curriculum and clear sense of purpose typifies the Black community schools.

Clearly, minority groups who see themselves struggling to end racial and economic oppressions will insist on fighting a school system that they see as part of the process of oppression. They see themselves engaged in political struggle, and they want community schools to prepare their young people for participation in this struggle. From this perspective, the pedagogical free school ideas of not structuring, pressuring, or inculcating social and political beliefs will seem neither relevant nor serious. Whereas A. S. Neill claimed that Summerhill students did not know his own political or religious beliefs, it would be odd for Black community school people to avoid projecting their belief in the Black revolution or Black consciousness. To see this as "laying a trip on the kids" would be to press some of the pedagogical concepts to a dubious extreme.

The political strand in the education reform movement insists on the essentially political nature of the educational system. In particular, it asserts that the groups in control of the major institutions of society use this school system and other institutions to help maintain the status quo. From this point of view, the very concept of educational reform presents ambiguities. Black and other minority communities either start their own schools outside the system or try to exert enough political power to get control of the public schools in their communities. They want to make schools active instruments in the struggle for freedom and equality. But many of the problems of the schools are not the product of the schools alone. The value of liberal education, the chance for getting jobs which are intrinsically satisfying and financially rewarding, the sense of growing up in a stable, sustaining social community—these conditions are not readily available to poor and minority youth. Neither community control of schools, nor a really effective alternative school like Harlem Prep, nor the new white working class high schools can change the basic discouraging social reality that most lower class or disadvantaged young people encounter. From the political perspective, although these community free schools can often do good things for some young people who were failed and unhappy in the public school, they have only been able to work with a very small number.

WITHIN THE SYSTEM: SOME PREDICTIONS

The problems of the public schools have become very obvious, even to those not as extreme as the free school proponents. The talk about educational reform has spread very far, even to the National Educational Association, as seen in its recent "Schools for the Seventies" series of pamphlets. Public schools have begun to consider free school reforms. The open classroom concept is gaining in popularity; high schools without walls, modeled after Parkway Project in Philadelphia, have been opened in several cities; street academy-style public high schools have been started in New York City and other places.

Many of these schools are very much free schools. This paper has concentrated so far on the outside-the-system free schools, since this is where the movement has been. In some public schools today, there is an increasing student participation in decision-making and an informality almost never found previously (elimination of most testing and grading, teachers and students on a first-name basis, student initiation of courses and projects). Still, there remains the control of the school board and the superintendent. Often there are compromises that participants have to make under outside pressure: Working out some form of grading system, or hiring only certified teachers, or discouraging open display of political beliefs that would arouse serious opposition in some segments of the community and thus cause the project to be abolished.

In any case, the Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, some public school officials, many respectable education writers and teachers, and parents and students have been urging the public schools to adopt at least some of the free school reforms.

So, along with the continuing growth of new small struggling free schools, there will be a widespread development of alternatives inside the system, supported by local, state, and federal aid. Many parent groups are organizing to ask school authorities for alternative public schools committed to open structure and a libertarian approach. For example, the Cambridge School Committee (Massachusetts) recently approved such a proposal from the Committee for an Alternative Public School—a group of parents who organized, lobbied and negotiated for almost two years to get a public free school. The number of parents, students and teachers who want such schools is growing rapidly, even though most Americans would still say that they basically approve the traditional style of the public school.

As noted before, the number of free schools continues to increase rapidly. But contrary to the predictions of some free school activists, this development will not quickly mushroom into thousands of schools and hundreds of thousands of involved students and parents. As the difficulties of running free schools and scrounging for meager resources become more widely known, enthusiasm will diminish. And as pressure for reform builds up on the public school system, it will seem more realistic as a strategy to build an alternative school inside the system, even at the cost of some compromise, than to establish another small and fragile free school which might easily fail after two or three years.

Even now, some schools which started outside the system are trying to figure out ways of being accepted as public schools in some form, without giving up their essential spirit or autonomy. This has recently happened to the Children's Community Workshop School in Manhattan, where the local school board voted to accept them as a public school. For many free school people who want their reform ideas to have wide effect, the possibility of free schools being alternative public schools will be very attractive, despite the constant danger of being coopted or controlled. As part of public systems, reformers will be able to gain more visibility and influence for their innovations. Also, public financial support will enable schools serving poor communities to achieve the stability needed to attract parents to what might at first seem a dubious and shaky experiment.

Some free schools will prefer to maintain their independence so as to ensure freedom from the pressures and compromises inevitably imposed by involvement in the public system. This stance includes both politically and pedagogically oriented school reformers, since it is obvious that there are free schools expressing both strands that would be too 'far out' for any state system to tolerate.

Whatever the future development, the free school movement symbolizes the growing desire for extensive educational reforms. But the reforms being sought are not merely tinkering around the edge of the system—like getting better text books, grander buildings, new curriculum material, or more free time for teachers.

These sorts of things even the most conservative principal or superintendent could find desirable. The free school idea challenges almost all of the ideas of the meaning of education: The right of the state to compel parents and students–often against their own beliefs and desires–to attend schools whose methods and curriculum are determined by the state. The free school represents in action a vision of young people and adults, learning, teaching, growing, playing–all in an atmosphere of freedom and joy.

Of course, the reality of many free schools does not match this vision. There are many problems and many unanswered questions. There are young people, teachers and parents who are unhappy and dissatisfied with free schools, just as they were with the public schools they left, though many of the reasons are different, of course. But whether this vision can actually be brought into existence for the great mass of school children is a big question. There have been other movements in education for radical progressive reforms, yet Charles Silberman was moved to sum up the situation he saw in three years of visiting public schools all across the country as follows:

> *It is not possible to spend any prolonged period visiting public classrooms without being appalled by the mutilation visible everywhere–mutilation of spontaneity, of joy in learning, of pleasure in creating, of sense of self. . . . Because adults take the schools so much for granted, they fail to appreciate what grim, joyless places most American schools are, how oppressive and petty are the rules by which they are governed, how intellectually sterile and aesthetically barren, what an appalling lack of civility obtains on the part of teachers and principals, what contempt they unconsciously display for children as children.*
>
> (Crisis in the Classroom, p. 10)

In a relatively small number of very small places called free schools, this is being changed (though many new problems appear). We can only hope with the free school people that the new wave of radical school reform will have some real impact and will not repeat the melancholy history of the other progressive reform movements.

RESOURCES

Journals

New Schools Exchange Newsletter, 701 B Anacapa Street, Santa Barbara, California 93101. Subscription: $10 per year. Twice monthly. Publishes lists of existing free schools periodically.

This journal has been covering the free school movement for over three years and provides the widest coverage. It also serves as a job-finding service for teachers and schools.

Outside the Net, P.O. Box 184, Lansing, Michigan 48901. Subscription: (two year) $4. Quarterly.

This journal, very thick, provides the most detailed material from free school and other education reform activities. Mixing long articles, personal accounts, photos, cartoons, poetry, letters, it provides a good picture of what is happening.

This Magazine Is About Schools, 56 Espanade Street East, Suite 401, Toronto 215, Ontario, Canada. Subscription: $4 per year (U.S.). Quarterly.

This Magazine will soon be entering its sixth year of publication, and is the most intellectually impressive journal to emerge from the radical school reform movement. Many of its worthwhile articles over the past years have been collected in *This Book Is About Schools,* edited by Satu Repo. The journal is more politically radical and more Canadian-oriented than in its earlier years.

Books and Articles

Sylvia Ashton-Warner, *Teacher,* Simon & Schuster, 1967, 191 pages, $2.95.

An account of doing a school in New Zealand, including Miss Ashton-Warner's fascinating approach to teaching reading.

Harold Bennett, *No More Public Schools,* Random House-Bookworks, 1972, 138 pages, $2.95.

A manual on how to start and run free schools.

Steve Bhaerman and Joel Denker, *No Particular Place to Go: The Making of a Free High School,* Simon & Schuster, 1972, 222 pages, $6.95.

An account of the troubles and joys of a radical free high school/commune in Washington, D.C.

Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education,* Random House, $2.95 paperback.

A good history of the Progressive Education Movement; how it grew and how it died.

The Elizabeth Cleaners Street School, *Starting Your Own High School,* Vintage, 1972, 237 pages, $2.45 paperback.

A very interesting account of a small group of New York high school students who started their own school. Includes material by the students, the teachers, interviews with the parents, lots of pictures. (The school itself can be contacted by writing: David Nasau, Thiells Road, Stoney Point, New York 10980.)

Mario Fantini, "Educational Agenda for the 1970's and Beyond: Public Schools of Choice," *Social Policy* 1:4 (November-December 1970), pp. 24-31.

A proposal by a prominent urban educator for a public school system including free schools.

Joseph Featherstone, *Schools Where Children Learn,* Liveright, 1971, $5.95.

Featherstone's deservedly famous articles on the open classroom in the British Infant Schools. Also articles on Harlem Prep and other such places.

Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America,* Random House, 1965, $1.95.

This and the following three books are well written, sensitive, original sociological analyses of youth in America, the way the public high schools socialize and the attitudes developed.

Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavisms,* Beacon Press, 1965, $2.45.

Edgar Z. Friedenberg, with Carl Nordstrom, *Society's Children: A Study of Resentment in the Secondary School,* Random House, 1967, $2.95.

Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent,* Delta, 1968, $1.75.

Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education,* Random House, 1962, $1.95.

The granddaddy of free school thinking in America. Astute observations in this and next three books about youth, growth, politics, organization, technology, science, the way education could be in a good society, the idea of "incidental education." Always deeply learned, concrete and intelligent.

Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd,* Random House, 1960, $1.95.

Paul Goodman, *New Reformation,* Random House, 1970, $5.95.

Paul Goodman, *People or Personnel?,* Random House, 1965, $1.95.

Allen Graubard, *Free the Children: Radical Reform and The Free School Movement,* Pantheon Books, expected publication January 1973.

A complete overview of the free school movement, its theory and practice, its past and future.

Allen Graubard, "The Free School Movement," *Harvard Education Review,* September 1972.

Ronald and Beatrice Gross, eds., *Radical School Reform,* Simon & Schuster, 1970, $7.95.

An anthology of excerpts from new education writers (mainly from the books on this list).

Harold Hart, ed., *Summerhill: For and Against,* Hart, 1970, 263 pages, $1.95 paperback.

A presentation of many points of view on Summerhill, from Erich Fromm to Max Rafferty.

James Herndon, *How To Survive in Your Native Land,* Simon & Schuster, 1971, 192 pages, $5.95.

A funny, touching, and enlightening account of teaching—in a middle class, white junior high.

James Herndon, *The Way It Spozed To Be,* Bantam, 1968, 188 pages, 75c.

A funny, touching, and enlightening account of teaching in a ghetto school. A brilliant writer and a very good man with much to say.

Alvin Hertzberg and Edward Stone, *Schools Are For Children: An American Approach to the Open Classroom,* Schochen Books, 1971, $5.95.

John Holt, *Freedom and Beyond,* E. P. Dutton, 1972, 273 pages, $7.95.

A main free school book. Especially good bibliography.

John Holt, *How Children Fail,* Dell, 1970, 223 pages, 95c.

Concrete observations by a sensitive teacher observer in this and the following three books. This one especially gives a clear and convincing description of the way the public school (and traditional private school) method harms children.

John Holt, *How Children Learn,* Pitman, 1969, 189 pages, $2.25.

John Holt, *The Underachieving School,* Delta, 1970, 205 pages, $2.25.

John Holt, *What Do I Do on Monday?,* Dutton, 1970, $6.95.

Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society,* Harper and Row, 1970, 116 pages, $5.95.

An exposition of how schooling is our new religion, why we must get rid of it, and what sorts of learning arrangements could replace school.

Herbert Kohl, *The Open Classroom,* Random House, 1970, 116 pages, $1.65.

A practical manual telling how a teacher can begin to open up his classroom.

Herbert Kohl, *36 Children,* Signet, 1968, 224 pages, 95c.

An account of teaching in a Harlem school.

Jonathon Kozol, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools,* Bantam, 1967, 242 pages, 95c.

An account of teaching and being fired in Boston. Winner of the National Book Award

Jonathon Kozol, *Free Schools,* Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1972, 146 pages, $4.95.

Kozol's experience with Black free schools.

George Leonard, *Education and Ecstasy,* Delta, 1968, 239 pages, $2.95.

An account of what Leonard sees as the scientific basis for an ecstatic free school for everyone.

A. S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child-Rearing,* Hart, 1960, 379 pages, $2.45.

The classic statement in our day of libertarianism applied to children and their schools.

New Schools: A National Directory of Alternative Schools, with introduction by Allen Graubard. c/o Cambridge Institute, 1878 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140, 1971, $1.25.

Ewald Nyquist and Gene Hawes, eds., *Open Education,* Bantam, 1972, $1.95 paperback.

A very complete paperback anthology.

Tim Parsons, "The Community School Movement," *Community Issues* 2 (December 1970).

A detailed monograph on community-controlled schools, both inside and outside the system.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity,* Delacorte Press, 1969, 218 pages, $5.95.

A discussion of how teachers could become free school teachers in the public schools. The "inquiry method" as the new revolution.

Salli Rasberry and Robert Greenway, *Rasberry Exercises: How to Start Your Own School (And Make a Book),* Freestone Publishing Company, 1970, 126 pages, $3.95.

Satu Repo, ed., *This Book Is About Schools,* Random House, 1970, $1.95.

An anthology of articles from *This Magazine Is About Schools.* A very varied, good, and useful collection.

Elwyn Richardson, *In the Early World,* Pantheon, 1969, $7.95.

An account of doing a new school in New Zealand. Marvelous work in the arts, with reproductions of the creations of the children—a beautiful book in several ways.

The Schoolboys of Barbiana, *Letter to a Teacher,* Nora Rossi and Tom Cole, translators, Random House, 1970, $1.95.

A marvelous book on education and schools. Written by eight Italian peasant boys, aged 11-13, flunked out of the public schools, but helped by a wonderful priest to do their own little school. They analyze the function and practices of the public schools in the light of what the system does to the poor. Deserves wide circulation.

Charles Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom—The Remaking of American Education,* Random House, 1970, $10.

A very detailed study of American schools by an editor of *Fortune* magazine, done for the Carnegie Corporation. Supports the criticisms made for years by education "radicals."

Miriam Wasserman, *The School Fix; NYC, USA,* Clarion, 1972, 568 pages, $3.95 paperback.

An enormously detailed and complex analysis of how an urban school system works its bad effects on all concerned—children, parents, teachers. Also an insightful account of the issue of community control and the New York teachers' strike of 1968.

Useful Centers, Clearinghouses, and People Involved with Free Schools

There are several regional clearinghouses for free schools. The people doing these projects know about the free schools in their areas and are good to talk to if one wants to find out what is going on.

They keep up on local developments and are happy to talk to teachers and parents who are interested in free school approaches. Often they arrange meetings and conferences, sometimes in conjunction with local schools of education, where free school ideas are presented and discussed.

Here is a reasonably accurate and up-to-date listing of such groups, moving from the East Coast to the West. Addresses change frequently, however.

Teacher Drop-Out Center, Box 521, Amherst, Massachusetts 01002.

The Center "Newsletter" is published monthly (with occasional supplements); $20 per year to join. It contains mainly information and listings to try to help teachers get jobs in free schools (including public free schools) and to help schools find teachers.

Education Center, 57 Hayes Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

A group in the Boston area that tries to spread free school ideas and is especially interested in establishing connections between free school and public school people. They publish *Centerpeace*, a mimeoed newsletter which provides a forum for discussion ($3 per year).

The Red Pencil, 131 Magazine Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

This is a paper put out by a group of public school teachers interested in radically reforming the public school system ($4 per year donation).

Education Action Fund, Box 27, Essex Station, Boston, Massachusetts 02112.

This was set up by Jonathon Kozol and Associates (profits from Kozol's book *Free Schools* goes into it). It channels money and other help to people working in urban free schools. It has a good list of contacts and much valuable material on how to start schools, how to raise money, etc.

John Holt, 308 Boyleston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02110, has a good list of materials and reprints.

Unschool of New Haven, P.O. Box 1126, New Haven, Connecticut 06505 (203–562-3690).

Puts out "The Northeaster," a mimeoed newsletter with news and views on educational alternatives in the New England area. Also holds conferences.

New Jersey Alternative Schools Federation, 271 Leonia Avenue, Leonia, New Jersey 07605 (201–652-4896).

A group that works with the alternative schools movement in New Jersey and distributes an occasional newsletter.

Summerhill Collective, 137 W. 14th Street, New York, New York 10011 (212–924-0896).

Publishes a newsletter and works with alternative education people in the New York City area. They arrange workshops and conferences.

New Schools Switchboard, c/o AFSC, 319 E. 25th Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21218 (301–366-7200).

Puts out a monthly newsletter of notes, new schools, and information for the Baltimore area ($2 per year).

Washington Area Free School Clearinghouse, 4632-A South 36th Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206.

Mimeos a newsletter with articles on free schools, descriptions of local schools, job openings and people looking for jobs, for the D.C. area.

Committee of Community Schools, 760 West End Avenue, New York, New York 10025 (212–666-8764).

A coalition of alternative community-oriented schools in New York City. Working to get public money for alternative schools.

Ohio Coalition of Educational Alternatives Now, c/o Metropolitan School, 444 E. Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215 (614–228-8797).

Fort Wayne Folk School, Box 681, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Publishes a newsletter, "Return to Learning," and works with people in Indiana interested in alternative school approaches.

Michigan Educational Alternatives Collective, P.O. Box 1444, East Lansing, Michigan 48823 (517–332-4666).

A group of people active in Michigan free schools and in publishing *Outside the Net*. They publish an irregular newsletter ($2 per year), arrange meetings and conferences.

Education Exploration Center, 3104 16th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55407 (612–722-6613).

A very active center that holds regular meetings, arranges conferences for people in and out of the public schools, helps start new schools, publishes a regular newsletter and a little book on the free school in the Twin Cities area.

New Schools News, c/o AFSC, 407 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60605 (312–427-2533).

Mimeos a monthly newsletter of information on free school activities in the greater Chicago area ($3 donation per year).

Innovative Education Coalition, 4535 S. Saratoga Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70115 (504–897-2947).

Mimeos a monthly newsletter and works with people interested in free school approaches in the New Orleans area.

Southwest Education Reform Community, 3505 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77002 (713–526-5547).

Helps people in Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico and Texas interested in free schools. They print a newspaper, "The Ark," 6-8 times yearly.

Rio Grande Educational Association, Box 2241, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501.

Encourages and organizes free school activities in the Southwest. They have a mimeoed newsletter ($5 per year).

New Ways in Education, 1778 South Holt Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90035 (213–839-6994).

Mimeos a monthly newsletter for Southern California with reprints and brochures about free schools and free school activities. The editor, Gladys Falken, also does a daily radio program on education on KMET.

Alternatives for Education, P.O. Box 1028, San Pedro, California 90733 (213–547-1629).

Mimeos a good monthly newsletter on innovative education in Southern California. Also distributes a list of Southern California free schools ($1).

New Schools Network, 3039 Deakin Street, Berkeley, California 94705 (415–843-8004).

Works with alternative schools, public and private, in Berkeley, and mimeos a small newsletter.

East Bay Education Switchboard, 805 Gilman Street, Berkeley, California 94710.

Helps new schools and new school people in the East Bay.

New School Movement, 402 15th Avenue East, Seattle, Washington 98102 (206–329-8300).

Holds regular meetings of new schools people in the Seattle area and mimeos a monthly newsletter on local free school happenings.

Wisconsin Coalition for Educational Reform, 3019 N. Farwell, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211 (414–962-8525).

Works with both public and free schools in Wisconsin, and mimeos a newsletter on educational reform.

Education Switchboard, Marin, 1299 Fourth Street, Suite 308, San Rafael, California 94901 (415–456-3050).

Serves the Marin County area.

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